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BEAUTY.

Il più nelli' uno.

MICHAEL ANGELO.

I. THE ARTIST'S THEME.

FRESH from the Maker's hand she came to earth,
The goddess Beauty, queen of all the throngs;
The birdling's plumage, and the songster's song
Alike attest where she has stamped her worth.
Passive or active, native or acquired,
She holds the heart, the mind, the ear, the eye,
And Faith stands voucher she can never die;
But live again in heavenly guise attired.
As fouler mediums portray that bright
Ethereal miracle of seven-fold light,—
This life of ours doth seem a veil obscure
To make, as with those hues, her members seem
All scattered, while it is the artist's theme
To re-unite them in a model pure.

II. THE LODESTAR.

Clothed in her vestal garb, or rich, or poor,
Intrinsic Beauty hath a mission here;
She entereth the palace of the peer,
Is housed within the cottage of the poor,—
A ministering visitant to cheer
The rayless gloom of deep despondent hearts,
A brightener of hours that even starts
Accordant pulses, as if God drew near.
Rising like incense from our thoughts and creeds,
Her blest aroma floods the air of life,
Embalms our actions, sanctifies our deeds,
The floating plume above the daily strife,—
She gleams incessant on the artist's chart,
The homage of his soul, the lodestar of his Art.

III. HER ENEMY.

Krieg führt der Wits auf ewig mit dem Schönen. SCHILLER.

Wit battles Beauty with her loud halloo,
And heartlessly with sparkling weapon mars
Those fair, soft features, while she counts the scars
To tell her glory like a boastful shrew.
She leads the legions of a bantling crew,
A very Mephistoph the locks and bars
Of knowledge to assail with her rude jars,
Deceiving into folly not a few.
Alas! the heart's blood will but coldly run,
To see false wisdom hold the dagger up,
With gore-drops dripping on the victim one,
And not a friend to pass the soothing cup,
Or e'en forbid the orgies, that would dare
In victim-gee, make mock of her despair.

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL, which was finished 600 years ago, has even a spruce and modern air, and its spire is the highest in England. I know not why, but I had been more struck with one of no fame at Coventry, which rises 300 feet from the ground with the lightness of a mullein-plant, and not at all implicated with the church. Salisbury is now esteemed the culmination of the Gothic art in England, as the buttresses are fully unmasked, and honestly detailed from the sides of the pile. The interior of the cathedral is obstructed by the organ in the middle, acting like a screen. I know not why, in real architecture, the hunger of the eye for a length of line is so rarely gratified. The rule of art is that a colonnade is more beautiful, the longer it is, and that *ad infinitum*. And the nave of a church is seldom so long that it need be divided by a screen."—R. W. Emerson.

"To see England well needs a hundred years. It is well packed and well saved; it is stuffed full, in all corners and crevices, with towns, churches, villas, palaces, hospitals, and charity houses. In the history of art it is a long way from a Cromleech to York Minster; yet all the intermediate steps may still be traced in this all preserving island."—R. W. Emerson.

METAPHYSICS AND BEAUTY.

WHEN a man talks about that which he does not comprehend to a person who does not understand him, the substance of their mutual entertainment is termed metaphysics. So says Sidney Smith.* Now there is no subject oftener seized upon as a peg on which to hang metaphysical thought than Beauty. Beauty, to many thinkers, seems to be an elevating as well as an exhilarating gas, exciting the brain and gestating ideas which convert the mind into an intellectual balloon, and this suspended before the curious eye of the many fixes the attention of all "wondering mortals that fall back to gaze upon it". But what do its slender threads support? A poor lone mortal beneath, a restless and impatient being, who seems to be discontented with the earth and thus takes an aerial flight, solely to shiver and shake in the freedom of mental clouds. We cannot help but speculate upon the *cui bono* of the aeronaut's excursion; we know he is certain to descend somewhere and, if we are humane, we are always anxious to know how and where he may alight; ergo, we consider a metaphysician as only an aeronaut in the realms of thought. And yet these voyagers sometimes report good things. No one will deny but that their position is an elevated one, and that they see many things we do not see, whatever may be the value of their vision. We are willing to admit that an occasional trip with a metaphysical pilot is useful. He shows us through the fog he is familiar with, attractive islands, sublime peaks and magnificent snow-mountains of vapor that charm and delight us. But, on the other hand, we tire of companionship with the elements; the voyage is, besides, a damp one, our pilot is at the mercy of the wind, and the vapor penetrating the thin garments suited to earth's equable climate, we are over glad to find ourselves again upon terra firma, frequenting its quiet waters and enjoying those substantial features of creation which we love and understand so well. Notwithstanding this disposition for short acquaintance with metaphysicians, we entertain respect for these "flying Deutchmen," and we are always grateful for ideas that are sufficiently intelligible to be instructive or suggestive.

We have said that Beauty is one of the oftenest selected themes for abstractive reasoning. M. Pictet says, in the commencement of his "Study of the Beautiful," that there is "nothing more obvious to feeling than the beautiful, and also that thought finds nothing more difficult to seize hold of. Every one knows, or thinks he knows, what is beautiful, but to the greatest number the why and the wherefore remains an enigmatical difficulty. There is nothing astonishing in this," and we think so too, for "the pure pleasure which accompanies the simple perception of the beautiful is obtained without effort, whilst the search for its principle demands the extreme of laborious thought. We willingly content ourselves, then, with the impression and the delight it gives us, and we even fortify ourselves against the reflection which comes to disturb and chill the sentiment." Every observer of

outward things who has looked inward will readily endorse the truth of the last sentence. But who will assert that we must enjoy feeling and ignore thinking? No M. Pictet, and not we, the writer, good reader. Feeling and thought are the two receptacles of a balance; the heart and the head are the equipoise weights, and God is the great inspector who tests their truth and keeps us from deceiving ourselves and others.

But to return to the author we quote from. He says, and truly too, that "for a long time, beginning with Plato"—whom, according to our own metaphor, we consider the greatest aeronaut that ever lived—"the theories of Beauty have been so abstract, so exclusively metaphysical, that they have frightened and repulsed all, especially artists and poets, who are devoted to its culture. Whenever these (artists and poets) have approached a theory, it has been done in the hope of finding aid for their practice and insight into the application of their art, and their disappointment has been very great upon discovering themselves in a labyrinth of subtle forms and pale generalities, which have furnished no kind of aliment to their imaginations." We know many an artist, many an amateur, many an embryo thinker, ready to give a hearty assent to this. We do not propose to follow M. Pictet in his thoughts consecutively, but quote here and there, as an idea appears worthy of quotation or comment. He does not seek to form a theory, and yet occasionally falls into a disposition to classify, which almost stamps him a theorist. What attracted us to M. Pictet is the following declaration, that—

"It is necessary to set definitions aside, and instead of Aristotle and Plato, go straight forward to the reality of things. We must shut the books of the philosophers, and try to read in the great book of nature which is open before us, and in the other great book—humanity, of which we are at the same time both the authors and readers. It will be time enough to see how others have interpreted their sublime texts after we shall have comprehended them our own way."

He goes on to say:—

"But to which of these two books shall we give our first attention? Both offer us an inexhaustible field of observation and research; both present themselves with equal authority. But the book of nature speaks and has always spoken the same language from the beginning of time, whilst the book of humanity has century after century revealed new ideas and new forms of expression. The first is shown to us as an unchangeable manifestation of unchangeable principles, the second appears to us like a thoughtful revelation, like the free creation of conscious power, master of itself and manifesting its development by progress. And more than this: these two books are not independent of one another. That of humanity is full of facts and citations borrowed from that of nature, to which it is everlastingly recurring; it imbibes there as if from its source, because it is, in fact, of more recent origin. The book of nature, then, is the first to be read, and there it is one must seek for a starting point to grasp the beautiful, embodied in its simplest and most elementary form."

* Metaphysics has been defined *l'art de s'égarer avec méthode* (the art of blundering methodically); no definition can be wittier or truer.—Leves.

"It has been often repeated that art is an imitation of nature. Whatever may be the sense attached to this word imitation, it will not be disputed that art borrows from nature a large portion of the elements she makes use of. The greater part of art creations have their models or their visible prototypes in the real world. Besides, man is himself, partially at least, a natural being, and the external world serves as a base and condition for the development of his faculties. Now, man *sees and feels beauty before producing it, and he necessarily sees it first in nature.* There he must go to search for it, and there to *study it*, in the beginning.

"To study the Beautiful, is to look upon its birth and progress, and in its various stages endeavor to seize upon the conditions of its existence and the law of its development. We have only to open our eyes in order to recognize that the beautiful and the sublime are spread over all nature in profusion, while the simplest observation shows us that these elements have not everywhere the same character nor the same degree of value. The beauties of inorganic nature; for example, are not the same as those of organized beings. And in the countless variety of nature's phenomena does there not exist some regular connection, some gradation, some law of order? Are they not bound together in some manner to the ascending progression of nature itself in its various kingdoms? Such are the first questions to examine. But in this relation, whatever may be the result of our investigations, we shall soon recognize that the exterior world presents us only half of the problem to be solved, and that to complete it *we must fall back upon ourselves, and see upon what conditions we receive within us the impression of the beautiful, so as to feel it and to reflect upon it.* Nature, deprived as she is of the element of a reflective conscience, produces and possesses the beautiful unknowingly. Now what is beauty if it be not absorbed by an intelligence which both comprehends and is sensitive to it?"

So say we. The first essential is to recognize the sensations produced by Beauty, and afterwards to reflect upon and increase the number of its external sources. It seems to us that the principle laid down by M. Pictet is not at all metaphysical, on the contrary a very common-sense one. Man is one thing and the outward world is another, and as man uses the images of the external world, in his declarations that he sees something beautiful, let him confine his words and actions to the world of beauty that delights him, and not leave it for the less perfect development of his own brain and heart. Said an artist to a philosopher, "What a beautiful world this is!" Said the philosopher to the artist, "What a pity man is not in harmony with it!" We do not care what the mental power of a metaphysician may be, we have no desire to journey with him to the infinite—a distance as great as man's imperfection is short of God's perfection—stopping at "subjective" and "objective" stations, and discoursing about the "fulfillment of function" and "coherent ratiocinations" so long as we can travel on foot, see with our own eyes and enjoy with our own hearts the beauty that our own nature will receive and profit us. The metaphysicians are

but hares—the tortoises are certain to win the race. We say, therefore, to all who love anything that is beautiful to them, love it independently of another man's love for something else. Receive no messages from heaven by any magnetic telegraph but your own; do not be deceived by subtle theories, which are simply metaphysical fire-works—the mere sputtering of Titans that would scale the Infinite. "Truth is only acquired by an interior awakening which may be provoked but not forced. It is not a fresh minted coin which one can receive and put in his pocket; its value must be created by one's self in order to become real property."

MATTER.—Matter is the production of an Almighty intelligence, and as such, entitled to our reverence; although from a just abhorrence of many ancient, and not a few modern errors, it has been too often regarded in a low and contemptible light. * * * It evinces in every part and every operation the impress of a divine origin, and is the only pathway vouchsafed to our external senses, by which we can walk

"Through nature up to nature's God."

that God, whom we behold equally in the painted pebble and the painted flower—in the volcano and in the cornfield—in the wild winter-storm, and in the soft summer moonlight.—J. M. Good.

There are two classes of philosophers now existing, both classes being active and numerous: those who strive to ignore matter—the transcendental, and those who abuse it—the mis-called practical men. Neither class respects, or even comprehends its use.—Ed.

COLERIDGE.—Going out he showed me in the next apartment a picture of Allston's, and told me that Montague, a picture dealer, once came to see him, and glancing towards this, said, "Well, you have got a picture!" thinking it the work of an old master; afterwards, Montague, still talking with his back to the canvas, put up his hand and touched it, and exclaimed, "By Heaven! this picture is not ten years old!"—so delicate and skillful was that man's touch.—Emerson.

THE POET.

BY THOMAS T. WATTS.

A POET dwelt in a city alone,
Alone with the surging crowd;
With their limbs of iron, and hearts of stone,
What cared they for the musical tone
Of his murmurings half aloud!

With their limbs of iron and hearts of stone,
They toiled for their precious gold;
What cared they, though in dreams he had flown,
To gather the flowers in Eden strown,
To scatter on earthly mold!

With their iron limbs, and pulseless hearts,
They steadily went their way
To the market places and merchant marts,
To count the wealth from distant parts,
And to waste another day.

With their limbs of iron and hearts so cold,
They laughed at the poet's words:
The tide of love from the soul outrolled,
"Your music is harsh to the clinking of gold,
And what do we care for your birds!"

"What do we care for your birds and your flowers,
Or the hush of the solemn wood,
Your drops of dew are not Danaë showers,
And what do we care for your vine-clad towers,
Or the rush of the mountain flood!"

With their limbs of iron, and hearts of stone,
They heeded not his cry,
Though he spoke of the seraph lands above,
Though he proved that the law of God is love;
They let him starve and die.

ON BOATS.

ANOTHER work by Ruskin!*—Being a student in the great world of nature and thought, like yourself, reader, whenever we encounter the works of a poet, high priest, thinker, philosopher, or saint, we feel the profoundest respect for him, and love to sit at the feet of his thought, and there tarry to listen and learn. But we consider the poet, high-priest, thinker, philosopher and saint only as a part of the nature he works with and upon, and freely to comprehend the operation of his mind, and judge results, we deem it necessary to possess a knowledge of the relations between his personality and the world he uses and talks about for the profit of his fellows. This element of our ignorance we must, however, wait for, being one of the utmost significance, but yet unattainable. In the meantime do not let us presume to judge, but study. We regard every earnest man like Ruskin, as a faithful traveller: we believe in his enthusiasm, in the clearness of his observation, and in the fidelity of his descriptions; we honor his motives, and are grateful for the information that he has procured for us. At the same time, we regard him only as a man. We do not feel bound to his sentiment, to his convictions, to the bias of his temperament, to the errors of his education, nor to the unseen, but powerful influence of his personal experience. We hold that every man possesses for himself a basis of judgment, in no wise to be controlled, or necessarily to be affected by, the same facts in the same way as the judgment of another man. The lack of confidence in our own feeling and judgment, a weakness so universally prevalent, accounts for the dogmatism and intellectual tyranny of so many energetic minds.

We doubt if there be another writer of the day like Ruskin so well calculated to arrest the attention of the general mind. He reports facts, he parades sentiment, he discusses business, science, theology, philosophy, art, and religion; he refers to the past and the future, and treats of the present, and in all these, he employs every description of rhetorical artillery that can be found in the magazines of lingual engineering. Ruskin makes one pause to consider, and, at the same time, to arm for defence; he commands conviction, and expects obedience through the strength of his own faith, and yet repels by sorrowful displays of uncharitableness, and the almost total absence of resignation. He seems to us always too much inclined to be denouncing hypocrites, instead of speaking discreetly like that intelligent scribe, the only man in the New Testament whom Jesus declared not to be far off from the kingdom of heaven. Ruskin disarms opposition by his evidences of labor, by his constancy, by his eloquence, by his insight, and by his obedience to, and clear exposition of some principles that are absolute and eternal. Ruskin is, in many respects, a kind of modern Dante: he is the prose expression of Dante's poetical feeling; he is equally bitter upon human nature, and equally sensitive to external nature, both of which he uses to reflect his own opinions and beliefs, as well as to express the resources of his consolation, such as it is, in this world.

* *The Harbors of England*: by J. M. W. Turner, with letter-press, by John Ruskin.